

501

ஸ்ரீ :

VEDANTA DESIKA SEVENTH CENTURY PUBLICATIONS

ஸ்ரீமதே நிகமாந்த மஹாதேசிகாய நம :

SRI VEGASETUSTOTRAM

&

ASHTABHUJASHTAKAM

of

SRI VEDANTA DESIKA ✓

With meaning and notes in English

by

D. RAMASWAMY AYYANGAR

&

A. SRINIVASA RAGHAVAN

Published by

THE VISISHTADVAITA PRACHARINI SABHA

7, Nathamuni Street,

T. NAGAR

::

MADRAS - 17

ANI SRAVANAM

Price

July, 1968

Rs. 1-50



26/70 G. Srinivasan

Sri Vegasetustrotram

श्रीमान् वेङ्कटनाथार्यः कवितार्किककैसरा ।

वेदान्ताचार्यवर्यो मे सन्निधत्तां सदा हृदि ॥

एकं वेगवतीमध्ये हस्तिशैले च दृश्यते ।

उपायफलभावेन स्वयंव्यक्तं परं महः ॥ १

ईष्टे गमयितुं पारम् एष सेतुरभङ्गुरः ।

यत्र सारस्वतं स्रोतो विश्राम्यति विशृङ्खलम् ॥ २

जयति जगदेकसेतुः

वेगवतीमध्यलक्षितो देवः ।

प्रशमयति यः प्रजानां

प्रथितान् संसारजलधिकल्लोलान् ॥ ३

विभातु मे चेतसि विष्णुसेतुः

वेगापगावेगविघातहेतुः ।

अम्भोजयोनेर्यदुपज्ञम् आसीत्

अभङ्गरक्षा हयमेधदीक्षा ॥ ४

चतुराननसप्ततन्तुगोप्ता

सरितं वेगवतीमसौ निरुन्धन् ।

परिपुष्यति मङ्गलानि पुंसां

भगवद्भक्तिमतां यथोक्तकारी ॥ ५

श्रीमान् पितामहवधूपरिचर्यमाणः

शेते भुजङ्गशयने स महाभुजङ्गः ।

प्रत्यादिशन्ति भवसञ्चरणं प्रजानां

भक्तानुगन्तुरिह यस्य गतागतानि ॥ ६

प्रशमितहयमेधव्यापदं पद्मयोनेः

श्रितजनपरतन्त्रं शेषभोगे शयानम् ।

शरणम् उपगताः स्मः शान्तनिःशेषदोषं

शतमखमणिसेतुं शाश्वतं वेगवत्याः ॥ ७

शरणम् उपगतानां सोऽयं आदेशकारी

शमयति परितापं संमुखः सर्वजन्तोः ।

शतगुणपरिणामः सन्निधौ यस्य नित्यं

वरवितरणभूमा वारणाद्रीश्वरस्य ॥ ८

काञ्चीभाग्यं कमलनिलयाचेतसोऽभीष्टसिद्धिः

कल्याणानां निधिरविकलः कोऽपि कारुण्यराशिः ।

पुण्यानां नः परिणतिरसौ भूषयन् भोगिशय्यां

वेगासेतुर्जयति विपुलो विश्वरक्षैकहेतुः ॥ ९

वेगासेतोरिदं स्तोत्रं वेङ्कटेशेन निर्मितम् ।

ये पठन्ति जनास्तेषां यथोक्तं कुरुते हरिः ॥ १०

कवितार्किकसिंहाय कल्याणगुणशालिने ।

श्रीमते वेङ्कटेशाय वेदान्तगुरवे नमः ॥

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SRI VEGASETU STOTRAM

by

SRI VEDANTA DESIKA

श्रीमान् वेङ्कटनाथार्यः कवितार्किककेसरी ।

वेदान्ताचार्यवर्यो मे सन्निधत्तां सा हृदि ॥

ஸ்ரீமான் வேங்கடநாதார்ய: கவிதார்க்கிககேஸரீ |

வேதாந்தாசார்யவரீயோ மே ஸந்நிதத்தாம் ஸதாஹ்ருதி ॥

INTRODUCTION

This is a hymn of ten *slokas* in praise of Lord Vegaa-Setu in Kancheepuram. The name by which the Lord is now popularly known is Yathokta-Kaari. According to the Satyavrata-Kshetra-Mahatmya contained in the Brahmanda Purana, Brahma, the four-faced, began to perform an Asvamedha in Kanchee with a view to realise the Supreme Being. His Consort, Sarasvati, who was doing penance on the banks of the River Sarasvati, refused to participate in the Yaga, though requested; and when, as a consequence, Brahma began the sacrifice with his other Consorts, Gayatri and Savitri, Sarasvati came to know of it, got angry and with a view to destroy the sacrificial altar (யஜ்ஞசாலை), took the form of a river and rushed with great speed. Brahma prayed to the Lord to come to his rescue. And the Lord, who never fails to respond to a genuine call for help, lay down in the way of the River like a big dam (Setu). The name given to the River is Vegavati

or Vega. The Lord who became the Setu or dam came to be known as Vegaa-Setu. This episode has been reproduced to us by Vedanta Desika himself in his Hastigiri Mahatmyam, which is an abridged Sthala Purana of Kanchi, written in the form of a Champu Kavya and also a Natya-Nataka—Dance-drama.

एकं वेगवतीमध्ये हस्तिशैले च दृश्यते ।

उपायफलभावेन स्वयंयुक्तं परं महः ॥ १

ஏகம் வேகவதீமத்யே ஹஸ்திசைலே ச த்ருச்யதே |

உபாயபலபாவேந ஸ்வயம் வ்யக்தம் பரம் மஹ: ||

1. The One Supreme Effulgence is seen as Svayam-Vyakta (Self-manifest) in the middle of the River Vegavati and also on the Hill, Hasti-Saila in the form of the means and the end (respectively).

This *sloka* finds a place in the Hastigiri Mahatmyam also. After Lord Varadaraja emerged from the Sacrificial altar, at one and the same time Brahma sees Lord Vega-setu with His westward-turned face and Lord Varadaraja with His eastward-turned face, and sings this *sloka*. Lord Vegasetu was the means by which Brahma was able to complete the Asvamedha Sacrifice. Lord Varadaraja was the fruit of that Yaga. The former is seen in the middle of Vegavati and the latter on Hastisaila. By His own grace the Lord manifested Himself in both the places and so He is referred to as Svayam-Vyakta. The word 'param' indicates that He is the Supreme Being and the word 'Mahah' shows He is

Effulgence. Param Mahah | Param Jyotis. Hastigiri Mahatmyam has it that it was a பரஞ்சுடர் before which the Sun became lamp lit in mid-day. (1)

ईष्टे गमयितुं पारम् एष सेतुरभङ्गुरः ।

यत्र सारस्वतं स्रोतो विश्राम्यति विशृङ्खलम् ॥ २

ஈஷ்டே கமயிதும் பாரம் ஏஷ ஸேதுரபங்குர: |

யத்ர ஸாரஸ்வதம் ஸ்ரோதோ விச்ராம்யதி விச்ருங்க்கலம் ||

This impregnable dam (bridge), where the unobstructed flow of the River Sarasvati (flow of words) comes to a halt, is capable of taking us to the other shore.

The idea that Lord Vegasetu is the means or Upaya expressed in the first *sloka* runs into this *sloka* also. He alone is capable of helping us to cross the stream of Samsara, a stream that has been for ages and ages unbridged and unforded. The Lord who lay down as a dam across the River Sarasvati is here described as a bridge.

The words ஸாரஸ்வதம் ஸ்ரோத: mean not only the flow of the River Sarasvati, but also the flow of Sarasvati (Vak - speech). The Upanishadic idea that speech returns without reaching Him is suggested here. The fourth *sloka* of Yatiraja Saptati can well be referred to here. There also the words ஸாரஸ்வதம் ஸ்ரோத; and விச்ரம் occur. The reference there is to Nammalwar's flow of words (Prabhandhas). His Prabandhas are capable of giving rest to the Vedas. (2)

जयति जगदेकसेतुः

वेगवतीमध्यलक्षितो देवः ।

प्रशमयति यः प्रजानां

प्रथितान् संसारजलधिकहोलान् ॥

३

ஜயதி ஜகதேகஸேது:

வேகவதீமத்யலக்ஷிதோ தேவ: |

ப்ரசமயதி ய: ப்ரஜாநாம்

ப்ரதிதாந் ஸம்ஸாரஜலதிகல்லோலாந் ||

The God, the one and only dam for the Universe who is seen in the middle of the River Vegavati shines victorious. It is He that puts an end to the surging waves the sea of Samsara for the benefit of beings.

The first word 'ஜயதி' shows that the poet is singing பல்லாண்டு to the Lord. His name may be Vegasetu; but He is really ஜகதேகஸேது—a dam that exists for the benefit of the Universe. The word தேவ: suggests that the ஜகத்ரக்ஷண is a கீட or sport. Those beings who have the good fortune to make use of this dam to cross the ocean of Samsara will not be bothered by the huge and surging waves thereof in which they have got enveloped for ages. Those waves no longer exist so far as they are concerned. (3)

विभातु मे चेतसि विष्णुसेतुः

वेगापगावेगविघातहेतुः ।

अम्भोजयोनेर्यदुपज्ञम् आसीत्

अभङ्गरक्षा हयमेधदीक्षा ॥

8

விபாது மே சேதஸி விஷ்ணுஸேது:

வேகாபகாவேகவிகாதஹேது: |

அம்போஜயோநேர்யதுபஜ்ஞம் ஆஸீத்

அபங்கரக்ஷா ஹயமேததீக்ஷா ॥

4. May the Dam that is Vishnu, which caused obstruction to the fast flow of the River Vegavati, ever shine in my mind; from the time of whose appearance the vow of Brahma to conduct the Asvamedha Yaga obtained protection without obstacle.

In this *sloka* Desika prays to the Lord to come and reside in his heart. The Lord is Vishnu Setu. Vishnu means "one who pervades everywhere". Pray do not make any exception in the case of my mind; but come and reside in it for ever. For, all legitimate desires will get fulfilled, every obstacle in their way being removed, the moment you appear as was the case with the Asvamedha Yaga of Brahma. For that Yaga which was threatened with immediate extermination began to grow from strength to strength from the moment you appeared there as Vegasetu. (4)

चतुराननसप्ततन्तुगोप्ता

सरितं वेगवतीमसौ निरुन्धन् ।

परिपुष्यति मङ्गलानि पुंसां

भगवद्भक्तिमतां यथोक्तकारी ॥

4

சதுராநநஸப்ததந்துகோப்தா

ஸரிதம் வேகவதீம் அஸௌ நிருந்தந் |

பரிபுஷ்யதி மங்களாநி பும்ஸாம்

பகவத் பக்திமதாம் யதோக்தகாரீ ||

5. This protector of the Yaga of the four-faced Brahma, who obstructed the 'River Vegavati, is one who according to the words of the devotees of the Bhagavan, promotes all kinds of auspiciousness to men.

In the short introduction above, we referred to Yathoktakaari being the popular name of this Lord in whose praise, this Vegasetu Stotram was sung by Desika. The name, Yathoktakaari, came to him as a result of what He did for Tirumalisai Alwar. It is said that Tirumalisai Alwar had a disciple Kanikannan by name who incurred the wrath of the king of that place and was ordered to go out of the country. The Alwar decided to follow Kanikannan. He did not stop there. He went to Lord Vegasetu who was sleeping in all glory and grandeur on Adi Sesha and sang thus :

“ கணி கண்ணன் போகின்றான் காமரு பூங்கச்சி
மணி வண்ண ! நீ கிடக்க வேண்டா—துணிவுடைய
செந்நாப் புலவன் யானும் செல்கின்றேன் நீயும் உன் தன்
பைந்நாகப் பாய் சுருட்டிக் கொள் ”

‘Kanikannan is going ; you who shine like the emerald in beautiful Kanchi ! Please do not continue here. I, the bold poet, am also going. Please roll up your couch of Adi Sesha.’ At once the Lord obeyed

and rolling up Adishesha like a mat and taking it with Him followed the Alwar who went after Kanikannan. The next morning when the temple doors were opened, the place was empty. The horrified temple servants reported the matter to the king who at once found out all that had happened, as a result of his externment order on Kanikannan. He rushed after the party leaving Kancheepuram and found them on the banks of the Palar where they had spent a night, which is even now called 'ஓரிரவு இருக்கை'. He fell at the feet of the Perumal and prayed for His return. Perumal pointed to the Alwar and the Alwar in turn to Kanikannan. The king tendered his apologies to Kanikannan, obtained his pardon and a promise to return to Kanchi. The Alwar thereafter addressed the Lord and prayed to Him in the following words :

“கணி கண்ணன் போக் கொழிந்தான் காமருபுங்கச்சி
மணி வண்ண ! நீ கிடக்க வேண்டும்—துணிவுடைய
செந்நாப் புலவன் யானும் போக்கொழிந்தேன் நீயும்
உன்தன்
பைந்நாகப் பாய் விரித்துக் கொள் ”

The Lord once again did as He was told. He came back to the shrine, spread His Adishesha and lay down on it, but with this difference. Formerly He had His head towards the north and lay facing westwards pillowing His right hand to His head. To show to posterity His alacrity in obeying the behests of a Bhakta, He now reclined on that Adishesha with head towards the south and the feet towards the north pillowing His left hand, a feature not to be seen in any

other Divyadesa where the Lord is seen in the Sayana pose. This incident earned for the Lord the title: பகவத்பக்திமதாம் யதோத்தகாரீ: He who acts as He was told by the devotees of Bhagavan. The Lord was ever a Yathoktakari—one who acted as He said, because He is never capable of duplicity—saying one thing and doing another. But now He shines as one who did what he was commanded to do by a devotee. யதோத்தகாரி the name by which He is known is short for பகவத் பக்தி மதாம் யதோத்தகாரீ.

In this Sloka Vedanta Desika enjoys the greatness of the Lord as Vegasetu in the first half and as பக்தி மதாம் யதோத்தகாரீ in the second half. By the word அஸௌ meaning 'This', He points to the Sleeping Beauty in this shrine and sees in Him the Vegasetu of Purana and the Yathoktakari of the tradition. He who protected Brahma and helped him to perform the Yaga after quelling the flow of Vegavati now confers His blessings on all men. He promotes their welfare by blessing them with all auspicious bounties in His gift. That is because the Alwars have prayed to Him to favour the men and women of this earth who are not able even to think of Him, much less to resort to Him. He blesses one and all by giving His darsan and by conferring on them all auspiciousness. (5)

श्रीमान् पितामहवभूषरिचर्यमाणः

शेते भुजङ्गशयने स महाभुजङ्गः ।

प्रत्यादिशन्ति भवसञ्चरणं प्रजानां

भक्तानुगन्तुरिह यस्य गतागतानि ॥

ஸ்ரீமாந் பிதாமஹவதூபரிசர்யமாண :

சேதே புஜங்கசயநே ஸ மஹாபுஜங்க: |

ப்ரத்யாதிசந்தி பவஸஞ்சரணம் ப்ரஜாநாம்

பக்தாநுகந்தூரிஹ யஸ்ய கதாகதாநி ||

6. He, the consort of Sri, is waited upon and served by the spouse of Grand-father (Brahma). He is a great gallant (voluptuary) and reclines on the Serpent-Cowch. The movements (going and coming) here of that follower of Devotees prevent and put an end to the journeying of people along the paths of Samsara.

The Lord's going away from Kanchi and coming back are themselves said to be capable of destroying Samsara for devotees. The Lord is here referred to as ஸ்ரீமாந் and also பக்தாநுகந்தூரி:—one who follows devotees. But by far the most significant name given to the Lord here is மஹாபுஜங்க—a term signifying one who is addicted to sensual pleasures. I have heard it said that there is a covert reference to the activities of a seducer in this *sloka*. It is not proper to explain the idea at any length. His movements arrest the movement of people who are, so to say, requested to come in. That apart, a mere recounting of the facts relating to this Lord's going and coming according to the behests of Tirumalisai Alwar is fraught with great spiritual significance. It will purify our mind and make us desist from continuing to roam about in Samsara. (6)

प्रशमितहयमेधव्यापदं पययोने:

श्रितजनपरतन्त्रं शेषभोगे शयानम् ।

शरणम् उपगताः साः शान्तनिःशेषदोषं

शतमखमणिसेतुं शाश्वतं वेगवत्याः ॥

७.

ப்ரசமிதஹயமேதவ்யாபதம் பத்மயோநே:

ச்ரிதஜனபரதந்த்ரம் சேஷபோகே சயாநம் |

சரணம் உபகதா: ஸ்ம: சாந்தநிச்சேஷதோஷம்

சதமகமணிலேஸதும் சாச்வதம் வேகவத்யா: ||

7. We take refuge in Him who did away with the obstacles in the way of Brahma's Asvamedha, who is subservient to those who resort to Him, Who reclines on the Serpentine body of Adishesha, who is entirely free from all blemishes, and Who is the permanent DAM OF EMERALD across the Vegavati.

In and by this *sloka*, Desika does Prapatti to the Lord. He includes his dependants also. Note the plural in சரணம் உபகதா: ஸ்ம: The description of the Lord by different epithets is evidently intended to show to us five different aspects of the Lord as Protector in whom alone one ought to seek refuge. The first is His capacity to do away with the obstacles in the Upasaka's progress. The next is His whole-hearted identification with one who comes to Him for protection to the extent, in fact, of becoming subservient to Him. His transcendent glory (பரத்வம்) is emphasised by referring to Him as சேஷசாயி. The next epithet emphasises His ஹேயப்ரத்யநீகத்வம் or His being bereft of all தோஷ or blemish. His உபாயத்வ or being Himself the means (னித்தோபாய) in addition to helping us in the obser-

சுதேவ

vance of the உபாய (ஸாத்யோபாய) according to our capacity. (7)

शरणं उपगतानां सोऽयं आदेशकारी
 शमयति परितापं संमुखः सर्वजन्तोः ।
 शतगुणपरिणामः सन्निधौ यस्य नित्यं
 वरवितरणभूमा वारणाद्रीश्वरस्य ॥

சரணம் உபகதாநாம் ஸோயம் ஆதேசகாரீ
 சமயதி பரிதாபம் ஸம்முக: ஸர்வஜந்தோ: |
 சதகுணபரிணாம: ஸந்நிதௌ யஸ்ய நித்யம்
 வரவிதரணபூமா வார்ணாத்ரீச்வரஸ்ய ||

8. This Lord who carries out the behests of those that seek refuge in Him, Who allays the distress of all beings standing before them, and in whose presence the boon-conferring-glory of the Lord of Varanasaila (Varadaraja) ever becomes hundred fold.

The efficacy of Saranagati at the feet of this Lord is emphasised in this *sloka*. It is first pointed out that He readily fulfils the commands of His Saranagatas. That may be a strong way of putting it. But, how assuring and helpful is the thought that the moment we perform Saranagati at the Lord's feet, He becomes ready to fulfil our slightest wish and confer on us everlasting Bliss. In the Raghuvira-Gadya, Desika has given expression to this sentiment in the sentence: தரணிஸுத சரணுகதி பரதந்த்ரீக்ருதஸ்வாதந்த்ரய .

தரணிஸுத சரணுகதி பரதந்த்ரீக்ருதஸ்வாதந்த்ரய .

The moment Sugriva performed Saranagati at Sri Rama's feet, Sri Rama placed His independence at Sugriva's disposal.

This sentiment appears to go one step further than the one expressed in Nyasa Tilaka :

சுருஷ்ய சாரங்கம் நிஜமபி பதம் தேசிகா தேசகாங்குடி

“தத்தே ரங்கீ நிஜமபி பதம் தேசிகா தேசகாங்குடி”

There the Lord was said to wait for the command of the Acharyas. Here, a mere Saranagata issues the ஆதேச or command. Such a Lord is here—
ஸோசயம். சோசயம்

The second line of the *sloka* says that the distress of all beings is wiped out. Reading the first and the second lines together we can take it that at the behest of Saranagatas, the distress of others connected with them is also banished. ஸம்முக : deserves special notice. The Lord not only helps to remove woes, but He does so by presenting Himself before those in distress. The moment He stands in front of them they feel elated. Thereafter even the removal of distress is not of much consequence.

It is because there is such a God like Vegasetu, the munificence of Lord Varadaraja gets multiplied hundred fold. The latter half of the *sloka* must be interpreted in the light of the first *sloka* in the Stotra where it was said Vegasetu is the Upaya or the means and Varadaraja is the Phala or fruit. (8)

काञ्चीभाग्यं कमलनिलयाचेतसोऽभीष्टसिद्धिः

कल्याणानां निधिरविकलः कोऽपि कारुण्यराशिः ।

पुण्यानां नः परिणतिरसौ भूषयन् भोगिशय्यां

वेगासेतुर्जयति विपुलो विश्वरक्षैकहेतुः ॥ ९

காஞ்சீபாக்யம் கமலநிலயாஸேதஸோபீஷ்டஸித்தி:

கல்யாணநாம் நிதிரவிகல: கோ஽பி காருண்யராசி:1

புண்யநாம் ந: பரிணதிரஸௌ பூஷயந் போகிசய்யாம்

வேகாஸேதுர் ஜயதி விபுலோ விச்வரகைக்ஹேது:11

9. This vast Vegasetu adorning the serpent couch is the embodiment of the fortune of Kanchi : He is the fulfilment of the good luck of Lakshmi's mind; He is the undiminishing treasure of all auspiciousness; He is an indescribably huge heap of Grace, and the fruit of our good deeds. Thus He shines victorious as the sole cause for the protection of the Universe.

Almost all the penultimate *slokas* of Desika's *Stotras* can be said to be *Dhyana slokas*. This is one such. Thinking of the various pleasing and beneficial aspects enumerated in this *sloka*, we can enjoy His beauty of form, His inseparable connection with Lakshmi etc. and sing Pallandu to Him.

It is worth nothing that the first *sloka* of Varadaraja Panchasat, a *Stotra* sung by Desika in praise of Lord Varadaraja ends with the words “கோபி காருண்ய

ராசி :” which find a place in this sloka. It looks as if Varadaraja Panchasat Stotra starts where the Vagasetu Stotra ends. (9)

वेगासेतोरिदं स्तोत्रं वेङ्कटेशेन निर्मितम् ।

ये पठन्ति जनास्तेषां यथोक्तं कुरुते हरिः ॥ १०

வேகாஸேதோரிதம் ஸ்தோத்ரம் வேங்கடேசேந நிர்மிதம் |
யே படந்தி ஜநாஸ்தேஷாம் யதோக்தம் குருதே ஹரி: ||

10. Those people who read or recite this Stotra on Vegasetu composed by Venkatesa—to them Lord Hari does as desired.

This is the Phalasruti of this Stotra. The name of the Stotra is given as Vegasetu Stotram. The author's name and phala also are mentioned. The two outstanding events connected with this Lord—His having become a Vegasetu and His becoming a Yathokrakari as enjoyed are touched upon, the one expressly and the other impliedly. “யதோக்தம் குருதே”—shows He is யதோக்த காரீ. The words can mean He acts as per His words. But having reference to the point emphasised in the Stotra more than once, these words must be taken to mean—He acts as per the desire of the devotee—here as per the desire of those who read, study or recite this stotra.

The Stotra started with the word ஏகம் and ends with the word ‘ஹரி’. It almost looks as if the two

Emberumans யதோக்தகாரி and வரதராஜ whose names find a place in the Stotra are really two different aspects of the same Hari.

कवितार्किकसिंहाय कल्याण गुणशालिने ।

श्रीमते वेङ्कटेशाय वेशन्तगुरवे नमः ॥

கவிதார்க்கிகஸிம்ஹாய கல்யாண குண சாலிநே ।
ஸ்ரீமதே வேங்கடேசாய வேதாந்தகுரவே நம: ॥

All glory to Desika

All glory to Vegasetu

Ashtabhujashtakam

गजेन्द्ररक्षात्वरित भवन्तं

ग्रहैरिवाहं विषयैर्विकृष्टः ।

अपारविज्ञानदयानुभावम्

आप्तं सतामष्टभुजं प्रपद्ये ॥

1

त्वदेकशोषोऽहमनात्मनन्त्रः

त्वत्पादलिप्सां दिशता त्वयैव ।

असत्समोऽप्यष्टभुजास्पदेश

सत्तामिदानीमुपलम्भितोऽस्मि ॥

2

स्वरूपरूपास्त्रविभूषणाद्यैः

परत्वचिन्तां त्वयि दुर्निवाराम् ।

भोगे मृदूपक्रमतामभीप्सन्

शीलादिभिर्वारयतीव पुंमाम् ॥

3

शक्तिं शरण्यान्तरशब्दभाजां

सारं च सन्तोष्य फलान्तराणाम् ।

त्वद्दास्यहेतोस्त्वयि निर्विशङ्क

न्यस्तात्मनां नाथ विभर्षि भारम् ॥

4

अभीतिहेतोरनुवर्तनीयं

नाथ त्वदन्यं न विभावयामि ।

भयं कुतः स्यात् त्वयि सानुकम्पे

रक्षा कुतः स्यात् त्वयि जातरोषे ॥

5

त्वदेकतन्त्रं कमलासहाय
 स्वेनैव मां रक्षितुमर्हसि त्वम् ।
 त्वयि प्रवृत्ते मम किं प्रयासैः
 त्वय्यप्रवृत्ते मम किं प्रयासैः ॥

6

समाधिभङ्गेष्वपि संपतत्सु
 शरण्यभूते त्वयि बद्धकक्ष्ये ।
 अपत्रपे सोढुमकिञ्चनोऽहं
 दूराधिरोहं पतनं च नाथ ॥

7

प्राप्ताभिलाषं त्वदनुग्रहान्मां
 पद्मानिषेव्ये तव पादपद्मे ।
 आदेहपातादपराधदूरम्
 आत्मान्तकैङ्कर्यरसं विधेयाः ॥

8

प्रपन्नजनपाथेयं प्रपित्सूनां रसायनम् ।
 श्रेयसे जगतामेतत् श्रीमदष्टभुजाष्टकम् ॥

9

शरणागतसन्त्राणत्वरद्विगुणबाहुना ।
 हरिणा वेङ्कटेशीया स्तुतिः स्वीक्रियतामियम् ॥

10

Ashtabhujashtakam

INTRODUCTION

This Stotra known as *Ashtabhujashtakam* contains ten slokas, though called an Ashtakam, in praise of Lord *Ashtabhuja* the Eight-armed Deity presiding over the Shrine of that name, just to the South of the Shrine of *Vegasetu* or *Yathoktakari*. This Perumal, like *Yathoktakari*, has been sung about by some of the Alvars, but He has to His credit a whole decad of *Tirumangai Alvar* (*Peria Tirumozhi* 2-8). The weapons in the eight hands of this Lord have been mentioned in a verse of that decad.

गजेन्द्ररक्षात्वरितं भवन्तं
ग्रहैरिवाहं विषयैर्विकृष्टः ।
अपारविज्ञानदयानुभावम्
आप्तं सतामष्टभुजं प्रपद्ये ॥

கஜேந்த்ர ரக்ஷாத்வரிதம் பவந்தம்
க்ராஹேரிவாஹம்விஷயைர் விக்ருஷ்ட: |
அபார விஜ்ஞாந தயாநுபாவம்
ஆப்தம் ஸதாம் அஷ்டபுஜம் ப்ரபத்யே

Seized by the crocodile-like sense-pleasures, I seek refuge in Thee, the Eight-armed Lord, who rushed in great haste for the protection of Gajendra,—Thee, having unlimited knowledge, mercy and glory, and the friend of the true and faithful.

Vegasetu Stotram had for its background the Puranas and the Tradition. Ashtabhu-jashtakam has for its basis the Divyaprabandham of the Alvars. The first sloka follows the 99th verse of Peyalvar's Third Tiruvantaadi which runs as follows :

“ தொட்ட படை யெட்டும் தோராத வென்றியான்
அட்ட புயகரத்தான் அஞ்ஞான்—குட்டத்துக்
கோள் முதலை துஞ்சக் குறித் தெறிந்த சக்கரத்தான்
தான் முதலே நங்கட்குச் சார்வு ”

The reference to eight weapons in the eight hands of the Lord and the reference to one of those weapons viz. the Chakra having been aimed at the crocodile which had seized the Gajendra by the foot are sung about in this sloka, and Prapatti also performed to that Lord as indicated by the last words of the Alvar's verse தான் முதலே நங்கட்குச் சார்வு. The similarity between the plight of Gajendra the king of the Elephants, and our plight is referred to and at the same time it is pointed out that our plight is worse. Only

சாத காலத்தி ருந் தாழ்வு விவர

one crocodile was the cause of Gajendra's woe ;
the number of crocodiles that have seized us is
legion—க்ரஹை : இவ விஷயை : விக்ருஷ்ட :—as if
 seized by numerous crocodiles in the shape of
 sense-pleasures. Gajendra appealed to the Lord
 for help and the moment the Lord heard the
 appeal, He rushed with all conceivable speed.
 Parasara Bhatta was so struck by the haste
 (த்வரை) evinced by the Lord that he devotes a
 whole sloka to describe it and winds up with
 paying his obeisance to that haste பகவதஸ்
த்வராயை நம : The opening words of this sloka
 refer to that haste. ௨௨ ௧௧ ௧௧ ௧௧ ௧௧ ௧௧ ௧௧ ௧௧ ௧௧ ௧௧

The unlimited and illimitable knowledge,
 grace and glory are referred to as they are all
 necessary traits which must be present in a
 protector. The words ஆப்தம் ஸதாம் show to us
 that He is the true friend of those who believe in
 Him and resort to Him. சுருதி: ௨௨ ௧௧ ௧௧ ௧௧ ௧௧ ௧௧ ௧௧ ௧௧ ௧௧ ௧௧ (1)

त्वदेकशोपोऽहमनात्मनन्त्रः

त्वत्पादलिप्सां दिशता त्वयैव ।

असत्समोऽप्यष्टभुजास्पदेश

सत्तामिदानीमुपलम्भितोऽसि ॥

2

த்வதேக சேஷோஹம் அநாத்மதந்ர:

த்வத்பாத விப்ஸாம் திசதா த்வயைவ |

அஸத்ஸமோஃப்யஷ்டபுஜாஸ்பதேச

ஸத்தாம் இதாநீம் உபலம்பிதோஸ்மி ||

Lord of the place known as Ashtabhujā ! I am a humble vassal of Thee and Thee alone. I am not independent. Though I am like one in a state of non-being, by Thee who conferest on me a desire for Thy feet, I have been made to possess a state of being.

The only thing worth having for men is a desire for Lord's feet. To the extent a man possesses it, to that extent alone he is a man. Without it he has really no existence and his state is only of non-being. We are all in that state now. At some point of time in the journey of the soul the Lord creates a desire in us to taste the pleasures His feet can afford. At once we obtain the feeling that we are the Lord's servants and slaves (சேஷ). By ourselves we are nothing. This sloka tells us that we must realise these several points. (2)

स्वरूपरूपास्त्रिविभूषणाद्यैः

परत्वचिन्तां त्वयि दुर्निवाराम् ।

भोगे मृदूपक्रमतामभीप्सन्

शीलादिभिर्वारयसीव पुंसाम् ॥

3

ஸ்வரூப ரூபாஸ்த்ர விபூஷணாத்யை:

பரத்வ சிந்தாம் த்வயி-துர்நிவாராம் |

போகே மருதா பக்ரமதாம் அபீப்ஸந்

சீலாதிபி : வாரயஸீவ பும்ஸாம்

Desirous that the beginning of enjoyment should be soft and gentle, Thou preventest for men by the exhibition of Thy qualities-affability and the like -- the difficult -- to get-rid-of thought of Thy transcendent supremacy induced by Thy essential nature, attractive form, weapons, ornaments and the like.

A contemplation of the Lord's Divyatmasva-roopa, Divyamangala Vighraha, possession of weapons for our protection and ornaments that are the delight of the devotees is apt to make us stand aghast in awe at his unapproachable supremacy. The tendency then would be to run away from Him afraid of His greatness--அம்மான் ஆழிப்பிரான் அவன் எவ்விடத்தான் was Nammalvar's reaction in one of his moods. It is said that with a view to dispel such a feeling in the Alvar, Lord showed His சீலம் the trait of being kind and courteous to inferiors and wean the Alvar from his determination to run away from the Lord; this exhibition of சீலம் makes the devotee forget for the nonce the Lord's paratva. This reference to the Astra and Vibhushana here must be understood in the light of the pasuram of Adhikarasangraham beginning with the words “புருடன் மணிவரமாக” where the Tattvas are shown to be some of the weapons and some ornaments.

The use of the word சீலம் is to be enjoyed specially as the stotra itself is in praise of an Archaroopa (image) of the Lord. The Lord's சீலம் or ஸௌசீல்யம் as it is sometimes referred to, is best seen in Archavatara. (3)

शक्ति शरण्यान्तरशब्दभाजं

सारं च सन्तोष्य फलान्तराणाम् ।

त्वद्दास्यहेतोस्त्वयि निर्विशङ्कं

न्यस्तात्मनां नाथ बिभर्षि भारम् ॥

4

சக்திம் சரண்யாந்த்ரசப்தபாஜாம்

ஸாரம் ச ஸந்தோல்ய பலாந்தராணாம் |

த்வத்தாஸ்யஹேதோஸ் த்வயி நிர்விசங்கம்

ந்யஸ்தாத்மநாம் நாத பிபர்ஷி பாரம் ||

O Lord ! Thou takest on Thyself the burden of those, who lay down their souls (selves) at Thy feet without any doubt or hesitation for the purpose of serving Thee after weighing carefully the power of those who possess the name of other protectors and the worth of the other fruits.

This sloka deals with the determination on the part of a chetana to surrender himself at the feet of the Lord and that too not for any benefit for himself but for the sole purpose of serving the Lord arrivedat after comparing the respective merits of the Lord on the one hand and of others

who lay claim to protectorship and also of தாஸ்ய to the Lord as against other fruits or benefits conferable by the Lord Himself. This is known as the state of mind of a Paramaikanti. He will not think of anyone else except the Lord as Protector ; and even from the Lord He will ask for nothing except service at His feet. In the case of such steadfast devotees, the Lord most willingly and gladly bears all their burden. That is why He is a நாத Lord Non-pareille. (4)

अभीतिहेतोरनुवर्तनीयं

नाथ त्वदन्यं न विभावयामि ।

भयं कुतः स्यात् त्वयि सानुकम्पे

रक्षा कुतः स्यात् त्वयि जातरोषे ॥

5

அபீதிஹேதோ ரநுவர்த்தநீயம்

நாத் த்வதந்யம்ந விபாவயாமி |

பயம் குத: த்யாத் த்வயி ஸாநுகம்பே

ரக்ஷாகுத: ஸ்யாத்த்த்வயி ஜாதரோஷே ||

O Lord ! For the purpose of getting rid of fear I will not think of any one but Thee as worthy of being sought after. If thou art favourably disposed towards me, from what quarter need I have fear ? If Thou art enraged at me, from where can I obtain protection?

Our faith in the Lord and in His powers of protection which came to us as a result of deep thought, reflection and comparison as pointed out in the previous sloka should make us feel that we can obtain freedom from fear only from Him. For if He is pleased to make us the object of His grace from what quarter need we have any apprehension that fear will overtake us. He is omnipotent and before Him no other person or thing can cause fear. At the same time if we are the objects of His anger from where or whom can we hope to get protection? For as Hanuman said to Ravana, if Lord makes up His mind to punish, no one else can save him, be he Brahma, Siva or Indra. (5)

त्वदेकतन्त्रं कमलासहाय

स्तेनैव मां रक्षितुमर्हसि त्वम् ।

त्वयि प्रवृत्ते मम किं प्रयासैः

त्वय्यप्रवृत्ते मम किं प्रयासैः ॥

6

த்வதேகதந்த்ரம் கமலாஸஹாய

ஸ்வேநைவ மாம் ரக்ஷிதும் அர்ஹஸித்வம் ।

த்வயிப்ரவ்ருத்தேகிமமம் ப்ரயாஸை :

த்வய்யப்ரவ்ருத்தே மமகிம் ப்ரயாஸை : ॥

Consort of Laksmi ! Thou should of Thy own accord protect me entirely dependent on

Thee When Thou beginnest to act, of what use are my efforts? If Thou hast not begun to act, of what avail are my efforts?

This sloka is a corollary to the previous one. In respect of those who are entirely dependent on Him for their protection the Lord must on His own initiative extend His protection. His samkalpa or Will alone, and no act or omission on the part of the chetana, must bring about the protection. That in this affair the Lord has the help of His consort Lakshmi is very beautifully suggested by the address. *Kamala sahaaya*. Here again we must be imbued with the feeling that efforts on our part will be of no avail in any event. If the Lord of His own Will begins to protect us there is no need for us to make any effort in that direction. So too if the Lord does not move in the matter of our protection, all our efforts will be thoroughly useless. This mentality depicts the extent of faith of a Prapanna.(6)

समाधिभङ्गेष्वपि संपतत्सु

शरण्यभूते त्वयि बद्धकक्ष्ये ।

अपत्रपे सोढुमकिञ्चनोऽहं

दूराधिरोहं पतनं च नाथ ॥

ஸமாதி பங்கேஷ்வபி ஸம்பதத்ஸு
 சரண்யபூதே த்வயிபத்தகக்ஷயே |
 அபத்ரபே ஸோடும் அகிஞ்சநோஹம்
 தூராதிரோஹம் பதநம் ச நாத ||

Natha ! Even when obstructions to intense contemplation occur, thou the protector being there ready to protect ; ...I, a helpless being, feel ashamed to put up with an ascent to height and an immediate fall (to a depth).

It is rather difficult to fully comprehend the import of this sloka. The use of the word ஸமாதி indicates that Desika is referring to Bhaktiyoga. When in the course of that long and arduous process failures set in as they often do, the Upasaka has to cry for help to the Lord. Of course He the protector is ready and willing to come to his rescue. In fact according to Ramajuna's Gita Bhashya the meaning of Charama sloka is only this. Desika the propounder, if not the promulgator of Prapatti yoga, has of course interpreted the charama sloka in a different way.

Knowing that with the help of the Lord at each stage one can progress in Bhakti yoga, yet helpless beings like us are afraid of following that path. One very good reason for not pursuing Bhaktiyoga is mentioned here. How often am I

to rise and how often am I to fall and cry out to the Lord during my fall? I am simply abashed at this “நாணிக்கவிழ்ந்திருப்பன்” as the Alvar puts it.(7)

நாணிக்கவிழ்ந்திருப்பன்

प्राप्ताभिलाषं त्वदनुग्रहान्मां

पद्मानिषेव्ये तव पादपद्मे ।

आदेहपातादपराधदूरम्

आत्मान्तकैङ्कर्यसं विधेयाः ॥

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ப்ராப்தாபிலாஷம் த்வதனுக்ரஹாந்மாம்

பத்மா நிஷேவ்யே தவ பாத பத்மே |

ஆதேஹபாதாத் 'அபராத தூரம்

ஆத்மாந்தகைங்கர்ய ரஸம் விதேயா: ||

By Thy grace I have acquired a liking for Thy lotus-feet ever served by Lakshmi. Pray create a taste in me for serving Thee to the end of my life enabling me to keep far away from sinful acts.

In this sloka Desika prays to the Lord to bless him with the desire to render service to Him all his life. Almost in a thankful mood he refers to having obtained by His Grace a desire for His feet, the feet caressed by Lakshmi. Having developed that desire in me, it is up to you, my Lord, to see that I evince a similar taste in the matter of rendering service at your feet.

That service or Kainkaryam must be one which endures to the end of this life. And what is more important it must be அபராத தூரம், far away from errors of commission and omission i.e. sins. This is an aspect which Desika never omits, to stress in order to impress upon us that after prapathi we have to be careful about our acts and omissions. That this sloka refers to உத்தர க்ருத்யம் or the post-prapatthi activities is clear. In fact the sloka with which உத்தர க்ருத்யாதிகாரம் of Srimad Rahasyatraya Saram begins voices this same sentiment அங்கீகூர்வந் அநகலளிதாம் வருத்திம் ஆதேஹ பாதாத். In the Nyasa Dasaka again we find Desika praying to the Lord to command him to render faultless service. நித்யம் நிரபராதேஷு கைங்கர்யேஷு நியுங்க்ஷ்வ மாம். (8)

प्रपन्नजनपाथेयं प्रपित्सूनां रसायनम् ।

श्रेयसे जगतामेतत् श्रीमदष्टभुजाष्टकम् ॥

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ப்ரபந்நஜனபாதேயம் ப்ரபித்ஸூநாம் ரஸாயநம் |

ச்ரேயஸே ஜகதாம் ஏதத் ஸ்ரீ மதஷ்டபுஜாஷ்டகம் ||

This lovely Ashtabhu-jashtakam is conducive to the well-being of all the worlds. To the class of Prapannas those who have performed Prapatti, it is like food and to those who desire to adopt Prapatti it is like a tonic.

With the 8th sloka the Stotra proper ends. That is how and why it is அஷ்டபுஜ அஷ்டகம். This and the next sloka contain the phala sruti and the Sattvika Tyaga.

This hymn is calculated for the Sreyas or well being and bliss of the entire world. It is like food to the Prapanna -- one who has performed Prapatti - food which will nourish them in their journey through life in the post prapatti period.

To the prapitsu, one who desires to become a prapanna it is like a sweet and invigorating tonic. To read and reflect upon these slokas will keep the prapanna on the right path, and help the prapitsu to become a prapanna. It helps both classes of people. (9)

शरणागतसन्त्राणत्वरद्विगुणबाहुना ।

हरिणा वेङ्कटेशीया स्तुतिः स्वीक्रियतामियम् ॥ 10

சரணாகத ஸம்த்ராணத்வராத்விசுணபாஹு நா |

ஹரிண வேங்கடேசீயா ஸ்துதி: ஸ்வீக்ரியதாமியம்||

May this hymn composed by poet Venkatesa be received by Lord Hari whose four hands got doubled owing to the eagerness evinced by Him

in the protection of those who have performed Saranagati at His feet.

This sloka which is the last sloka of this stotra makes a respectful offering of the eight slokas of the stotra and contains a prayer to the effect that the eight-armed (Ashta-bhuja) Lord may deign to receive this stotra of eight slokas. Incidentally, the sloka gives an excellent reason for the doubling of the usual four hands of the Lord into eight hands. Vishnu is always contemplated upon as a Chaturbhuja. This Lord however has eight hands. The explanation offered is that the eagerness and haste with which the Lord rushes to protect. His devotees in distress are the cause for doubling of hands. It is noteworthy that the stotra begins by referring to twara or haste and ends by referring to the same twara. The Lord evinced great haste in rushing to the rescue of Gajendra. That shows that the Lord is keenly interested in protecting His Saranagatas, those who have surrendered themselves to Him. Thus the Gajendra-rasksha-twara of the 1st sloka is presented in the last sloka as Saranagata-Santrana-Twara. Andal in the last verse of her Tiruppavai refers to “ஈரிரண்டு மால்வரைத்தோள்” She evidently thinks of Lord Krishna with His 2 arms Visible to all,

and sings that those 2 arms get doubled for the delectation of His devotees. Desika goes a step further and doubles the four into eight, the reason for that doubling being the inordinate haste with which the Lord rushes to protect those who appeal to Him for help. The use of the word "Hari" which is the name given to the Lord in this sloka is also very significant. The devotees of the Lord when they get up from sleep in the early hours of the morning always utter the name 'Hari' and go on to recite the 2 famous slokas both of them referring to the protection of Gajendra. The 6th verse of Tiruppaavai makes a reference to the use of the word "Hari" by the munis and yogis. The devout believe that the utterance of the name "Hari" is capable of dispelling all sins (ஹரிர்ஹரதி பாபாநி). They also believe that an unfailing palliative for bad dreams is a contemplation of the Gajendra episode. Parasara Bhatta has specifically referred to this aspect while commenting on the names in the Vishnu-sahasranama beginning with the word Sabda-asahaha (912) (சப்தஸஹ ;) and including "துஸ்வப்ந நாசன :"

Vedanta Desika has sung his stotras with several ends in view, the chief among them being

the benefit that accrues to the reader. Viewed in that light, this stotra is intended by the great Acharya to be devoutly recited in times of distress, and for getting rid of evil effects of bad dreams. The word “ஸ்துதி” is feminine gender. May the Lord be pleased to accept this “ஸ்துதி” (lady) “இயம் ஸ்துதி” (this stotra) reminds us of “இயம் ஸீதா”. The satvika thyaga adopted for this stotra is as novel as it is pleasing. (10)

“கவிதார்க்கிகஸிம்ஹாய கல்யாண குணசாலினே
ஸ்ரீமதே வேங்கடேஸாய வேதாந்த குரவே நம :”

16/8/74 ✓

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✓